

3 Hungate Interview – Dr. Jon Kenny

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Dr. Jon Kenny is Community Archaeologist for York and the surrounding district, as well as being a staff member at York Archaeological Trust. Last interviewed by The Post Hole in Issue 4, he here answers questions set by Co-Editor Mark Simpson about the Hungate site.

Mark Simpson – Can you start please by giving us a bit of background to the Hungate site?

Jon Kenny – The excavations at Hungate were undertaken in advance of an extensive housing development in the area bounded by the Foss to the east and south, the Stonebow to the north and the BT building to the west. A number of evaluation projects began back in 2000 and led to targeted excavation for 5 years starting in 2007 on areas of the development where the building would destroy the archaeology. Over 95% of the archaeology on the site remains preserved in situ for the future. Most of the public eye has fallen on the large trench that sits next to Stonebow and Hungate, but we should remember that some of our significant work was nearby, especially on some of the industrial remains we excavated.

MS – What was your role on site?

JK – My role at Hungate was a Community Archaeologist for YAT. This involved looking after the Community Team of volunteers who helped on site and supporting the Young Offenders project that we ran. So Hungate had a great deal of influence on my work and the skills of community archaeologists from York but it was only part of my day to day work.

MS – How much do you feel that the Hungate excavation has contributed to our knowledge of York through time?

JK – The answer to this question will become clearer as the post excavation and publication process bears fruit. We can already see that the Roman material gives us a chance to study an extensive burial site located next to a river. The burial site was located on and near early ditches that may have significance for the early development of Roman York. Anglo Scandinavian activity was also extensive and allows us comparison with Coppergate and also to come to grips with the extent of Jorvik as a city. The medieval significance of the Hungate area, at least where we excavated, shows us a large open area dedicated to waste processing and possibly other activities adding to our understanding of how a large medieval city like York managed its peripheral areas (next to the King's Pool).

Post Medieval Hungate is significant for some who occupied the land such as the Cordwainers, who built a hall there, but also for its apparent use as a green corner containing gardens and cottages and presumably supplying fruit and veg to the city.

The infilling of the area in the 1800s is of course another significant contribution to our understanding of York. So often overlooked in York, the recent archaeology of workers housing has been a highlight of the excavation. Closely studied by Rowntree and others when it still stood, this and the variety of industrial archaeology in Hungate has been a significant contribution to our understanding of the story of York.

MS – It has been said that Hungate has been the most important excavation in York since Coppergate in the 1970s. Would you agree with that?

JK – In terms of scale, Hungate has been slightly larger, but it is difficult to match the influence of Coppergate on the place of the Vikings in culture today. The Coppergate excavations and the development of the Jorvik Viking Centre had a profound effect on the place of Vikings in the National Curriculum, then being developed. It is difficult to anticipate such far reaching influence again.

Hungate however, will rank with Coppergate because of its broader influence on our approach to the archaeology of York in terms of interest in post medieval and especially 19th century York. It will also leave significant contributions to a wide range of time periods outlined above. So in short it will not beat Coppergate for influence on our interest in Vikings, but can match it for its breadth of archaeological understanding of York. (I think!)

MS – Hungate has been a multi-period site. What were the significant finds from specific periods?

JK – The variety of grave goods from the Roman cemetery makes for exceptional exhibition potential. Worked jet and shale body adornments all appear heavily in talks and presentations that I give to community groups far and wide in Yorkshire. Obviously the skeletons themselves will also be important finds as the osteological analysis is collated. The Viking Age finds that stand out are probably the wooden finds, particularly the cellar walls that gave us a picture of ship timbers reused in the building. The gold coin found in a medieval pit has been used on posters and is attractive as treasure (especially as it was found by a Community Team member), but the real significance of the medieval finds will come with analysis of the everyday rubbish we found. The 19th century gave us more down to earth material again. Items from everyday life in typical workers housing and oddities from industrial sites such as the brick with graffiti preserved in the wall of the Leatham's Mill that said *"I hear john george robert hartley is a silly fool bloody fool to"*.

MS – As well as the professionals, Hungate has been dug by community groups, students and volunteers from across the world. Do you feel this has been a contributing factor to the site's success?

JK – My experience of Hungate has been an integral part of the community contribution to the project. Involving so many people in the process of archaeology has made this a very open excavation spreading interest and awareness around the UK and the world. Especially with the reach afforded by social networking on the Internet, an effect we would not have foreseen in 2007.

MS – Do you think that Hungate has raised the archaeological profile of York?

JK – The numbers of people participating in the excavation, visiting the excavation or seeing it on the television or Internet must have had an effect of the profile of York. Clearly this is difficult to quantify but the present television interest in archaeology has led to the site being included in numerous documentaries (more to come from Michael Wood) and in programmes such as The One Show which came to Hungate in its first week of broadcasting.

MS – How do you think the Hungate excavation will be viewed in ten years time?

JK – This is likely to be answered by the publications that come out of the excavation. Academic significance will stem from the reporting and publication of the varied aspects of the site I outlined earlier. The material recovered and

recorded should also feed into numerous research projects so that in ten years the site archive should be a popular stopping off point for researchers. New areas have been opened; the 19th century significance of Hungate is strong in the USA and Australia where that period is more extensively studied. Certainly in ten years time a large number of people will look back on Hungate because of their participation in the excavation in one way or another, but wider public profile will depend on how it is presented.

MS – What are your favourite memories from on site?

JK – My memories of the site are centred on the Community Team and the Young Offenders. From the first access for the community in the snow, to finding the gold coin, the sense of togetherness when removing the sets from Haver Lane in the mud and rain and successes and difficult moments with the young offenders. For me the site was about the archaeological significance of what we were involved with and about the people who were with us.

MS – Excavation ended at Hungate in December 2011, after five years. Or did it?

JK – There is a great deal of work yet to do on Hungate, lots of analysis and publication. The project is by no means finished because the trowels have been put away. But because the development has slowed due to the economic climate we have also been able to carry on *Archaeology Live!* (the YAT field school) at Hungate for another summer. So if you are looking for a field school take a look at Archaeology Live (<http://tinyurl.com/clvd66d>).